



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

***COMPREHENSIVE  
ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT  
STRATEGY  
GUIDELINES***

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## Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Guidelines

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The public reporting burden for this collection varies from 240 hours for an initial CEDS, 50 hours for an annual CEDS, 75 hours for the CEDS update, to 25 hours for a CEDS developed without EDA financial assistance or as part of designation requirements per response including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to: Economic Development

# **GUIDELINES**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is the result of a local planning process designed to guide the economic growth of an area. For the purpose of these Guidelines, the terms “area”, “region” and “community” are often used interchangeably to refer to an appropriate political, economic, geographic, or environmental entity for addressing economic development. A CEDS process will help create jobs, foster more stable and diversified economies, and improve living conditions. It provides a mechanism for coordinating the efforts of individuals, organizations, local governments, and private industry concerned with economic development.

A CEDS is required to qualify for Economic Development Administration (EDA) assistance under its public works, economic adjustment, and most planning programs, and is a prerequisite for designation by EDA as an economic development district (EDD).

The CEDS must be the result of a continuing economic development planning process, developed with broad based and diverse community participation, and contain the following:

- An analysis of economic and community development problems and opportunities including incorporation of any relevant material or suggestions from other government sponsored or supported plans;
- Background and history of the economic development situation of the area covered, with a discussion of the economy, including as appropriate, geography, population, labor force, resources, and the environment;
- A discussion of community participation in the planning efforts;
- A section setting forth goals and objectives for taking advantage of the opportunities of and solving the economic development problems of the area serviced;
- A plan of action, including suggested projects to implement objectives and goals set forth in the strategy; and
- Performance measures that will be used to evaluate whether and to what extent goals and objectives have been or are being met.

Public Law 105-393, the Economic Development Administration Reform Act of 1998, a comprehensive amendment of the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965, as Amended (PWEDA), requires a strategy to qualify for assistance under most EDA programs.

Since the original PWEDA was enacted in 1965, economic development planning has been a key element in achieving EDA's long-term goals. The Overall Economic Development Program (OEDP) process created a truly effective Federal/local partnership. The planning assistance program supporting the OEDP process helped develop the capacity of local organization to work in partnership with state and local public and private leaders, business, and governments to define their economic challenges and develop effective strategies to revitalize their communities. The original PWEDA required applicants to demonstrate compatibility of a project with a locally developed EDA-approved OEDP to qualify for financial assistance. EDA will continue to direct its investments based on strategies resulting from locally controlled participatory planning processes established to develop and maintain the CEDS.

This guide is intended to assist in efforts to develop, implement, and document a CEDS process. It describes the steps to follow, participants, required documents, evaluation and, for districts and other EDA supported planning organizations, the updating procedures, and reporting requirements.

## 2. WHAT IS A CEDS?

A CEDS emerges from a continuous planning process developed with broad based and diverse community participation that addresses the economic problems and potential of an area. The strategy should promote sustainable economic development and opportunity, foster effective transportation systems, enhance and protect the environment, and balance resources through sound management of development.

EDA may accept as a CEDS any locally, state, or regionally prepared plan, a plan prepared under any Federally supported program, or a previously approved OEDP, provided that it is current and its preparation and contents are consistent with these Guidelines. Future references to a CEDS in this document should also be considered to include a previously approved OEDP.

The CEDS analyzes local conditions, identifies problems and opportunities, defines the vision and goals of the community, designs the strategies to accomplish these goals, coordinates activities to implement these strategies, and evaluates and updates the process. The time it takes to develop an effective process depends on an area's experience with economic development, the complexity of its problems, and the degree of coordination and cooperation among the participants. A successful CEDS process should lead to the formulation and implementation of a program that creates jobs, raises income levels, diversifies the economy, and improves the quality of life, while protecting the environment. The process must adopt a logical approach to long-range development while identifying and implementing short-term problem solutions to achieve early results and maintain momentum and public support.

The CEDS document should be readily accessible to the economic development stakeholders in the community. There should be a continuing program of communication and outreach that encourages broad-based public engagement, participation, and commitment of partners. The general public, government decision makers, and business investors should be able to use it as a guide to understanding the regional economy and to taking action to improve it. The strategy should take into account and, where appropriate, incorporate other planning efforts in the community. Its quality should be judged by its usefulness as a tool for local decision making.

Each CEDS is unique, reflecting the specific challenges and opportunities of its area. It should contain four main elements: *analysis, vision, action plan, and evaluation*. The analysis should assess the state of the regional economy, the opportunities and

threats posed by external trends and forces, and the availability of partners and resources for economic development. The community's vision and goals, together with an appraisal of the region's competitive advantage, should set the strategic direction for the action plan. The action plan should establish program priorities for implementation. Finally, the CEDS should establish criteria and performance measures for evaluation of the process and for the periodic update of the document.

### 3. WHO SHOULD PREPARE A CEDS?

Any area seeking to formulate and implement an economic development program will benefit from a CEDS. Successful economic development efforts are based on comprehensive economic development strategies.

A CEDS is required by the Act, as a precondition for EDA assistance for:

- (1) **Public works and economic adjustment grants.** To be eligible for assistance under the public works or economic adjustment programs, the applicant must accompany the application with a CEDS acceptable to EDA. A current CEDS previously approved by EDA, may be included by reference instead of submitting a copy of the document. The proposed project must be consistent with a the CEDS.
- (2) **EDD designation.** As a prerequisite for designation, a proposed EDD must prepare a CEDS that is approved by EDA, as well as meet all other requirements for designation.
- (3) **Planning organizations.** To receive EDA ongoing planning grants, EDDs, Indian tribes, and other eligible organizations must develop and maintain a CEDS process. The initial CEDS document, subsequent annual reports and revised CEDS, must be submitted for review and approval by the appropriate EDA regional office.

A CEDS is not a prerequisite when the request is for planning assistance to develop, update or refine a strategy under the economic adjustment program (Section 203 or 209 of the Act). However, the resulting economic adjustment strategy must conform with the CEDS requirements, although it may focus on the factors that caused the immediate economic distress and how recovery can be accomplished.



## 4. HOW TO PREPARE A CEDS

The preparation and level of detail of a CEDS will depend on local circumstances, the economic development organization's staff capacity, and level of resources of the area.

The following sections describe the basic elements that should be included in the formulation of a CEDS. They provide guidance to an area for organizing and staffing for economic development, analyzing its economic problems, developing a vision and key goals to be pursued, formulating program strategies that document the process, and evaluating its accomplishments. Updating the strategy and process is covered in the next section.

### A. Organizing and Staffing for Economic Development.

The key to a good strategy is an ongoing, participatory planning process.

#### (1) The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee

An area should establish and maintain a Committee to oversee the CEDS process. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee (Strategy Committee), the entity identified by the planning organization as responsible for developing, updating, or replacing a strategy, is the principal facilitator of the economic development planning and implementation process. The Committee should represent all major interests of the community to ensure that viewpoints of all components of the community are considered and to take advantage of local skills and resources in program formulation and implementation. It should include representatives of local governments, business, industry, finance, agriculture, the professions, organized labor, utilities, education, community organizations, public health agencies, the aged, disabled, the unemployed, underemployed, racial or ethnic minorities, and women. In selecting Committee members, the following elements should be considered:

- **Public Leadership.** Public leadership support is essential for the coordination necessary to develop and implement the action plan. The Committee should include appropriate representation from participating local governments.
- **Economic and Business Development Organizations.** Several organizations might be involved directly or indirectly in efforts to promote the economy. Chambers of Commerce, labor organizations, real estate companies, financial institutions, utility companies, and quasi governmental

development organizations are examples. In addition, regional, county, and local planning commissions typically are involved in activities that affect economic development. The role such organizations might play in developing and implementing a CEDS should be examined. When appropriate, they should be represented on the Committee. Particular attention should be given to business and industry representation.

- **Employment and Training Sector.** Linkage between economic development and labor force skills, community colleges, vocational-technical schools and school-to-work programs, are often crucial. Local employment and job training organizations, such as labor unions and private industry councils, should be represented.
- **Community Organizations.** The needs and concerns of housing and neighborhood associations, special interest groups, environmental protection groups, historic preservation groups, agricultural or farming associations, and citizen Committees affect economic development. These groups should be represented in the Strategy Committee.
- **Women, Minorities, Aged, and Disabled.** Traditionally, the unemployed and underemployed, women, minorities, the aged and the disabled have not been equitably represented in local decision making. Representation on the Committee assures that their needs and solutions to their problems are given appropriate consideration.
- **Other.** Health, education, social services, and other professions or special interests groups that might have an impact on the development of the region should also be involved.

## **(2) Working Relationships**

Once the Strategy Committee is formed, the next step is to define its role and relationships with existing local, regional, and state institutions. A clear understanding of these different roles and relationships at the outset will avoid conflicts and establish positive working relationships for implementing the development process.

## **(3) Staff Support**

The Strategy Committee will frequently consist of people with other responsibilities who do not have enough time to conduct the day-to-day functions required to assure the success of the process. These functions include collecting and analyzing information on the area's economy, identifying strategy options, and preparing detailed implementation plans. The Committee, commensurate with the

resources of the economic development organization, should ensure that adequate staff resources are available to perform these functions.

#### **(4) Committee Work Program**

The work program provides the agenda for the Strategy Committee. The Committee should adopt a work program that describes each task to be performed, identifies the individual, organization, or work group responsible for completing each task, and establishes timetables.

For the process to succeed, the Committee should take advantage of technical and financial assistance available from public and private sources. These sources include Federal, state, and local governments, foundations, educational institutions, local organizations, and major corporations. EDA support under the planning, technical assistance, or economic adjustment programs may be used to help organize or carry out a CEDS, and for updating or refining a strategy.

### **B. Analysis: Where are we?**

An analysis of the region should answer the question Where are we now? The Strategy Committee must have a clear understanding of the local economic situation. The planning process should begin with relevant research and analysis by the economic development organization staff.

The overall analysis of the local economy should use current demographic and economic data. Data sources include, but are not limited to, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Census Bureau and Bureau of Economic Analysis; the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics; state, tribal, and local governments; and universities. Useful web links can be found at the EDA WEB Site, the address of which is [www.doc.gov/eda/](http://www.doc.gov/eda/). EDA-funded University Centers may serve as valuable resources in providing and analyzing the necessary data. The analysis should also draw from any relevant and recent studies on hand and the knowledge of Committee members and staff. Economic analysis may be undertaken at varying levels of depth. The Committee must determine the level that is best for its resources. The analysis should be presented in the CEDS document in a clear and concise manner, and be easily understood by non-specialists in the general public.

#### **(1) Background Information**

The first step in analyzing the area is identification of the elements that affect the local economy. Information should be gathered in the following areas as appropriate:

- Demographic and socioeconomic data, including labor force characteristics.

- Geographic, climatic, environmental, and natural resource profile.
- Infrastructure of the area including water, sewer, communications, and electrical distribution systems, and all transportation modes.
- Major sectors of the economy and their past, present, and projected contributions to employment, income, and revenue.
- Relationship of an area's economy to that of the larger region or state, with particular regard to locational advantages or disadvantages.
- Factors that directly affect economic performance in the area such as state and local laws; financial resources; transportation systems, energy costs, business, personal, and property taxes; bonding capacity; and land use patterns.
- Other factors that indirectly affect economic performance in an area such as housing; health services; schools; educational, cultural, and recreational facilities; public safety; and environmental issues relating to flood plains, air quality, wetlands, historic preservation, hazardous waste contamination, smart growth initiatives, and brownfield reuse.

Existing plans and planning processes in the region should be researched and considered. These might pertain to transportation, land use, housing, downtown revitalization, air and water quality, environmental protection, and welfare reform.

## **(2) Issues Covered**

The analysis should address the following as appropriate:

- **The state of the regional economy.** What are the strengths and weaknesses? What are the growth sectors and clusters? What is driving the economy and where is it heading?
- **External trends and forces.** What are the opportunities and threats? How is the region positioned in the national and global economies?
- **Partners for economic development.** Who are the important actors in the region? These may include organizations, businesses, or individuals that represent important issues, including those unfamiliar to the economic development organization such as workforce development, social service delivery, and natural resources.

- **Resources for economic development.** What groups, organizations or individuals does the area have to work with? Who can provide support and funding for the development activities?

From the analysis, local leaders should be able to determine if the identified problems can be addressed by local institutions. Emphasis should be given to the problems that local public and private sectors can resolve either directly or indirectly. Particular attention should be given to groups and areas suffering most from unemployment and other economic distress.

### **C. Vision: Where do we want to be?**

The vision statement should answer these questions: Where do we want to be? In the next ten to twenty years? What are the goals? What are the areas in which the region can build competitive advantage? How can the region's strengths and opportunities be maximized, and its weaknesses and threats mitigated?

The most common method to develop a vision statement is by a series of sessions or workshops. These workshops should begin with an analysis of the region and encourage participation by partners and the general public.

The staff of the economic development organization should coordinate the visioning process with broad participation of the community. A draft vision statement that includes goals should be circulated widely for review and comment. The Strategy Committee should review and approve the vision statement and goals.

#### **(1) Vision Statement, Goals and Objectives**

The vision statement, goals and objectives should respond to the analysis of the area's development potential and problems. The goals should reflect the desires of most area residents and should also be realistic and limited in number. Some should address things that can be realized within a short period of time, while others require a longer period for implementation. The vision, goals and objectives will provide a framework for public and private decision making and serve as the basis for the formulation of the action plan.

#### **(2) Setting Priorities**

Priorities must be established to provide a basis for decisions on the use of available resources. Establishing priorities at the goal-setting stage is a critical step toward formulating the CEDS. The following factors should be considered:

- The effect that achieving each goal will have on the development potential or problem.

- Whether the goal is directed toward achieving short-, intermediate-, or long-term results.
- Actions related to the goal that are already underway or planned.
- The relationship of this goal to the accomplishments of other goals.

The result of setting priorities should be a ranking of goals. Each goal should have a rationale that is clearly understood and publicly supported. Public meetings provide an opportunity to ensure that goals are consistent with community aspirations and existing developmental plans. The CEDS goals and priorities should be formally ratified by the Committee and the governments it represents.

Not every goal needs to be subjected to a full-scale assessment. Many areas lack the capacity or resources to develop or implement strategies for every goal. Consequently, the Strategy Committee may choose to limit its focus to the highest ranked goal or goals for the first year or so.

Goals provide the basis for formulating the action plan and serve as milestones to evaluate the accomplishments of the CEDS process. Goals provide benchmarks by which the Strategy Committee, area officials, economic development stakeholders, and the community can measure performance.

#### **D. Action Plan: How Do We Get There?**

The action plan answers the question “How do we get there?” and is based primarily on long-term goals. The action plan describes activities and groups them into programs designed to achieve the desired results and to turn potential for improvement into reality. The action plan also assigns responsibility, resources, time frames, and priorities for implementation.

The area's action plan is the link between the up-front analysis of the area's economy and development potentials and the resulting programs, activities, and projects that are the product of the CEDS process. It is a multi year strategy that includes activities and programs to take advantage of opportunities for the economic development of the area. Though its primary focus is long range, the action plan should identify some elements that can be achieved in a short or intermediate time frame.

The Strategy Committee has the central role of overseeing development and implementation of the action plan. On the basis of the analysis of the area's economy, the Committee will decide how to capitalize on the area's assets. From these decisions, the Committee then can set priorities and implementation schedules.

Assumptions about economic trends should include the outlook for the area's economy, causes of the area's economic problems, and kinds of economic activities that might generate additional employment and income.

Expected changes in economic factors should take into account significant proposed actions that will impact the regional economy such as the construction of a new interstate highway, the closing of a military installation, or regulatory constraints on development.

The vision and goals of the CEDS should be evaluated to determine the time frame and resources required for their implementation. Criteria to guide the use of resources should include (1) how the unemployed and underemployed are to benefit, (2) what economic programs are to be used for development activities and investment, (3) the geographic locations of development activities and investment, and (4) how economic development programs and projects will be sponsored and managed.

The action plan has two components: the prioritization of programs and activities and an implementation schedule.

### **(1) Prioritization of Programs and Activities**

Identification of activities should be as broad-based as possible involving those affected by the proposed activities, and those that can ensure their success. Partnerships with a variety of organizations and the private sector in the region are a key to successful implementation. The list of programs, and the activities involved may be too long to accomplish all at once. They should be prioritized, using the following questions for guidance:

- *What are the activities and what are their expected benefits?*
- *Which activities address the areas or issues of greatest need and/or best enhance the region's competitive advantages?*
- *Do these activities represent the best use of limited resources?*
- *Will the activities have positive economic, environmental, and social impacts?*

### **(2) Implementation Schedule**

The schedule identifies the most important program activities and proposes a time frame and an implementation schedule for each, in multiple phases if needed. The level of detail of the implementation schedule will be determined by the level of sophistication of the professional staff of the organization, and the resources the

area has available to implement the actions. This section should describe programs and activities and identify the range of public, private and nonprofit support for each.

#### **E. Evaluation: How Are We Doing?**

Evaluation should be an element of an ongoing planning process and should answer the questions How are we doing? and What can we do better?

An outline of the evaluation process should be included in the CEDS. Performance measures should be identified to evaluate the progress of activities in achieving the vision and goals. Preparation of an evaluation is the responsibility of the economic development organization professional staff under the guidance of the Strategy Committee. If resources permit, the Strategy Committee may invite an outside party, such as staff from another economic development district, a university center, or a consultant, to assist in the evaluation.

#### **F. Documentation**

The CEDS document should serve as a record of all the steps of the process followed and of the broad and diverse participation of the community in the development of the strategy.



## 5. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The following reporting requirements apply only to EDDs and other EDA-funded planning organizations, in compliance with the requirements of 13 CFR, Part 303. A copy of all CEDS documents should be sent to all appropriate state agencies for information. All CEDS documents, including the initial CEDS, CEDS annual reports, and revised CEDS must be available for review and comment by appropriate state and local government bodies, and local interest groups in the area covered.

### A. Initial CEDS Document

Prior to EDA approval, the initial CEDS prepared by an EDD should be submitted for review and comment to the appropriate agency of the state or states in which the EDD is located, and the comments received, if any, included with the document.

### B. Annual Report

After EDA has approved the initial CEDS, EDA-funded planning grantees are required to submit annual reports. The annual report documents the progress achieved on economic development activities regardless of the source of funding, and reports on changing economic conditions. The annual report should be a short document and readily accessible to the public and decision makers to use to keep track of the CEDS and its implementation. The annual report should:

- (1) **Adjust** the CEDS as needed. Adjustments to the strategy may be necessary during the course of the year to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities or address unexpected problems. These adjustments should be consistent with the overall strategy and must be documented in the next annual report. Any changes in the structure or composition of the Strategy Committee or staff should also be described in the annual report.
- (2) **Report** on the previous year's economic development activities and any significant changes in the region's economic conditions. A report of economic development activities undertaken in the previous year should be related to the needs identified in the strategy and to the objectives of the Act. Doing so will assist EDA and other Federal agencies in reporting the benefits resulting from the use of Federal funds.
- (3) **Evaluate** effectiveness in meeting goals. The report should contain an evaluation that measures effectiveness in meeting the goals of the strategy and the objectives of the Act. Performance measures should be identified to

evaluate the progress of activities. EDA funded planning grantees should conduct annual evaluations of the performance of the CEDS process and include the results in the annual report submitted to EDA.

- (4) **Schedule** achievable goals for the coming year. A program of activities should be set out in a format similar to the action plan contained in the CEDS document. The details in the schedule of activities should be as definitive as possible and should set the baseline for reporting performance in the next annual report. The program of activities should also, as appropriate, be incorporated into the work program of EDA-funded planning grants.

## **B. Revised CEDS**

A new, updated, or revised CEDS is required at least every five years, or sooner if EDA or the planning organization determines that the CEDS is inadequate due to changed circumstances. For example, the CEDS document can be amended to accommodate unforeseen changes caused by natural disasters, major economic adjustments, or rapid changes in national priorities. Any part of the CEDS document, including the program projections, development strategies, or plans for implementation, may be changed upon resolution of the area Strategy Committee, and concurrence of EDA.

## 6. EDA'S ROLE

The primary points of contact between the organization responsible for preparing the CEDS and EDA are the Economic Development Representatives (EDRs) or the regional office staff person assigned responsibility for the state, as well as the regional planning staff. Their role is to:

- ! Provide general technical assistance and advice.
- ! Provide general advice to the economic development organization on the best use of EDA and other Federal sources and expertise.
- ! Provide specific advice on which projects might be considered for EDA funding.
- ! Facilitate EDA approval of the CEDS and annual reports.
- ! Help identify other Federal programs that might be used to implement portions of CEDS.
- ! Help the planning organization address multiple Federal planning requirements.
- ! Assist the planning organization to use the resources of state governments, where appropriate.

The EDR and other regional staff may be particularly valuable in explaining environmental, civil rights, historic preservation, project notification and review, and other Federal requirements effectively and efficiently to minimize duplication among Federal programs.

Economic development organizations are encouraged to work with and make use of other EDA programs such as University Centers, Local Technical Assistance, Trade Adjustment Assistance Centers, Economic Adjustment Assistance, and State Planning Assistance. EDA regional offices and EDRs can provide current information on accessing these programs.

### ! EDA Approval

When an initial CEDS document, an annual CEDS report, or a CEDS update is completed, one copy of the document must be sent to the EDR or the regional staff person assigned responsibility for the state, and one copy to the regional office. A copy of the CEDS document should also be submitted to the governor or the appropriate

state agency for review and comment. An attachment should be submitted to EDA listing local agencies that received a copy of the document for review and including their comments.

The document will be reviewed by the EDA regional office and the EDR. If the document is acceptable, the Regional Director will notify the area in writing within 60 days that the CEDS has been approved. If the document is unacceptable, the Regional Director will provide written comments within 60 days to the chairperson of the Strategy Committee, identifying the deficiencies and allowing additional time to correct them. Assistance in revising the document may be requested from EDA.

EDA approval is based on the following criteria:

- **Quality.** The CEDS document must respond to an area's development potential and problems and propose reasonable strategies and actions. It should also demonstrate that the CEDS process has been followed and that it involves broad participation of stakeholders in the area's economy.
- **Priorities.** The CEDS document must give priority consideration to the area's economically distressed population. The document should analyze the nature and causes of distress and adopt strategies, goals, and objectives specifically designed to reduce distress in those areas.
- **Local Initiative.** The CEDS document must identify local actions, (procedural, regulatory, and financial), that can be undertaken with little or no outside reliance on Federal financial assistance.
- **Regulatory Requirements.** The CEDS documents must demonstrate how EDA requirements and Federal regulations will be met (13 CFR Chapter III). Of particular importance are civil rights and environmental laws and regulations. Sufficient details should be provided to demonstrate compliance with all applicable civil rights requirements, directives, and regulations. The document should contain adequate environmental information and analysis to identify potential environmentally sensitive sites and issues in the region that would preclude development. The actions and projects proposed should take into account sound principles of sustainable development and smart growth.



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